

Layoff Paid Off for Engineer: Boosted Second Career

By Ronald G. Guest
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LINCOLN — In March of 1970, Richard A. Allen met with the same fate thousands of engineers before him had; he was laid off from his job.

Yesterday, sipping iced tea at his Bowles Terrace home,

the Southboro native and former Marlboro resident said it "should have happened 10 years ago."

What has transpired in the meantime to prompt Allen's admiration for unemployment is his development of the Allen Universal Rack, an

array of shaped tubing nuts and bolts, that, when attached to an automobile, will hold one, two or more bicycles.

His invention has already taken hold and is being marketed nationwide by Raleigh Industries of America

and internationally by a firm in Holland.

Casually dressed in khaki bermuda shorts, a sweatshirt and shin + high boots, the father of two young boys admits his creation has not yet made him a millionaire but with royalties of five per cent on the way from all European sales and with a growing U.S. market, Allen is fully confident his future is secure enough to warrant continued development of his product line.

VW Rack

Allen began his budding career about three years ago when, in "a couple of hours," he invented the only bicycle rack made exclusively for Volkswagen cars.

Was it a stroke of genius that prompted the creation? "Not exactly," he admits.

"I bought a new VW and wanted to carry my bike to the Cape without scratching the car. I had to find a way to build a rack that would hold it," he said.

The only products on the market at the time were bumper and roof racks neither of which worked well on the popular, imported, economy auto.

Scraping up some tubing and using an ingenuity that had led to the creation (he refuses to call them inventions) of several other gadgets around his home,

Allen twisted, bent and shaped what was to become his first commercially successful product.

That success began with the Bicycle Exchange of Cambridge and soon spread to many other bike dealers in the area.

But had it not been for a decision at the Avco Company's Everett office to lay Allen off, the only people to use an Allen rack might have been Volkswagen owners.

That decision, for which Allen is grateful, prompted the unemployed engineer to take a hard look at his position.

"I took a broad look at the whole situation and discovered it wasn't the same as it had been the last 10 or 15 years," he says.

Finding what he called a "crying need" for a universal bike rack of the same design he had already invented for the VW's, Allen went to work for about three weeks, "day and night", until what has become known as the Allen Rack was completed.

After applying for a patent (which is pending), Allen investigated the offer of a nationwide company. It wanted to mass produce the product and market it nationwide.

But Allen said that the company didn't want to pay for it. Except for royalties, it

wanted the invention for nothing, and Allen wasn't interested.

The company within a short period of time had copied the rack and started selling it, according to Allen.

Allen says the imitation of his rack has been "cheapered", and because of that, he isn't too worried about the competition.

There is another out, he admits, but it's a decision he doesn't want to make.

Now that his product is international, Allen says, if American firms put on too much pressure with imitations, he can import thousands from Holland and flood the U.S. market.

He doesn't want to do this, he says, because it won't help the American balance of trade. (That balance shifts against the U.S. every time this nation imports more

goods that it exports.)

In the future the near future he says, there will be attachments to his rack that will convert it to a ski rack. Already it can be used to store bicycles on a garage wall or used to hold a bike in position for repairs.

But the link to the ski industry seems to Allen to be the key to the future. Through investigation he has found that this industry is looking for another field that will carry it through the summer months and bicycles appear to be the choice.

"It's a natural choice," he said, "for both skiing and bike riding are youth-oriented markets and that's where the audience is today."

Would Allen give up his newfound interest and return to the work - a - day world?

"Never," he says.

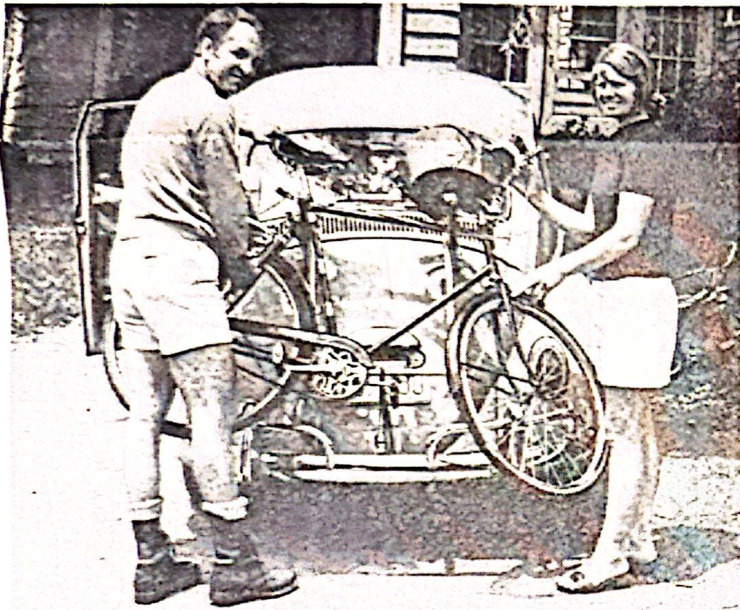
"I might go back to

working for someone else," he adds, "but it would have to be on my own terms and even then, I wouldn't give up what I have started."

Further, his family is in agreement with his decision.

His wife, Nelleke (Remkes) of Holland and his two boys, Christopher, 4, and Alexander, 3, see more of him now, an arrangement only possible when a man is able to work for himself.

And notwithstanding his education which includes graduation from St. Mark's School in Southboro, a B.A. degree in physics from Harvard University and a year at Boston University, all of which qualify him for a good position on most company ladders, Allen has now set his own course in life, a course guided by a confident attitude and a determination to succeed on his own.



Richard A. Allen and his wife, Nelleke, demonstrate the Allen Universal Rack for bicycles a product he invented.

